

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SANA

S E C R E T ADDIS ABABA 4448

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PINS, ET
SUBJ: ETHIOPIA, JULY 1977

1. WITH ETHIOPIA UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE IN ERITREA AND OGADEN, DIPLOMATIC CORPS (AND NO DOUBT SOME ETHIOPIANS AS WELL), IS BEGINNING TO SPECULATE WHETHER OR HOW LONG EPMG, AT LEAST IN ITS PRESENT FORM, CAN LAST IF SITUATION CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE IN BOTH AREAS. AS USUAL THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS.

2. LOSS OF EITHER OR BOTH OF ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS WOULD NOT IN OUR JUDGMENT AUTOMATICALLY SIGNAL MENGISTU'S DOWNFALL, BUT LOSSES COULD TRIGGER REACTIONS BOTH WITHIN AND WITHOUT MILITARY THAT COULD NONETHELESS IMPACT ADVERSELY ON DIRG CONTROL. KEY IS STILL MILITARY. WE CONTINUE BELIEVE THAT ANY
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FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN GOVT IS UNLIKELY WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY SUPPORT OR MILITARY ACQUIESCENCE TO STAND ASIDE. WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO GOVT IF MILITARY ITSELF WERE TO SPLIT INTO FACTIONS ACTIVELY OPPOSING EACH OTHER IS YET ANOTHER MATTER. ARMY'S RECENT PERFORMANCE IN ERITREA HAS BEEN POOR, AND THERE ARE SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS OF LOW MORALE AND SOME RELUCTANCE TO

FIGHT. ON OTHER HAND, THIRD DIVISION APPEARS TO HAVE ACQUITTED ITSELF REASONABLY WELL IN RECENT FIGHTING IN OGADEN, AND THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT MILITARY AS A WHOLE OR SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF IT ARE THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT TURNING ON MENGISTU OR DIRG. SHOULD REVERSES CONTINUE, HOWEVER, AND MORALE DETERIORATE FURTHER OR A SCAPEGOAT BECOME NECESSARY, SUCH A DEVELOPMENT IS NOT OUTSIDE REALM OF POSSIBILITY. WHAT MILITARY MIGHT DO THEN IS PURE CONJECTURE AT THIS STAGE, BUT NUMBER OF OPTIONS OPEN TO THEM WOULD BE WIDE, RANGING FROM ALLOWING EVENTS TO TAKE THEIR COURSE WITHOUT MILITARY PARTICIPATION, TO REPLACING MENGISTU AND ALL OF DIRG WITH A NEW MILITARY GOVERNMENT (DESPITE LACK OF OBVIOUS POTENTIAL LEADERS) OR WITH CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT.

3. SECOND KEY IS KEBELES AND PEASANT MILITIA, BOTH CREATURES OF DIRG. WHETHER MILITIA CAN MAKE DECISIVE IMPACT ON BATTLEFIELDS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. MANY OBSERVERS HERE THINK THIS UNLIKELY, BUT SHOULD IT COME TO PASS, MENGISTU'S PROBLEMS WOULD OBVIOUSLY EASE CONSIDERABLY. SHOULD MILITIA, WHICH REPRESENTS MENGISTU'S EFFORTS AT MOBILIZING PEOPLE IN DEFENSE OF ETHIOPIA, FAIL, HOWEVER, MENGISTU COULD FIND HIMSELF WITH WIDESPREAD INTERNAL PROBLEMS HE DOES NOT REALLY HAVE NOW. WHAT MILITIA MIGHT THEN DO AND WHETHER IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES KEBELES, WHICH THUS FAR APPEAR TO BE LOYAL TO HIM AND ON WHICH
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HE DEPENDS FOR CONSIDERABLE LAW ENFORCEMENT ESPECIALLY IN ADDIS ITSELF, WOULD CONTINUE THEIR SUPPORT OR FALL TO FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES IS AGAIN MOOT AT THIS POINT. THEIR PERCEPTION OF ROLE OF MILITARY WOULD BE CRUCIAL.

4. THERE WOULD CERTAINLY BE CIVILIANS WAITING IN WINGS IF MENGISTU WERE SERIOUSLY THREATENED, INCLUDING SOME OF POMOA, ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP) AND ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (EDU). WITH POSSIBLE EXPECTATION OF POMOA, HOWEVER, WHICH MIGHT CONCEIVABLY ROUND UP MILITARY AND/OR PEASANT/KEBELE SUPPORT, NONE OF THESE COMMANDS ENOUGH FIREPOWER TO REPRESENT MUCH OF A THREAT BY ITSELF, AND CHANCES OF THEM ACTING IN CONCERT, PARTICULARLY EDU, WOULD NOT APPEAR STRONG.

5. WHETHER SOVIETS AND THEIR SURROGATES CAN OR WILL ACT TO TRY TO BOLSTER MENGISTU'S POSITION, SHOULD THAT BECOME NECESSARY, IS ANOTHER OPEN QUESTION. PRESUMABLY THEY COULD SEND IN MORE WEAPONRY AND ADVISERS, IF THEY PERCEIVED THEY WOULD BE PUT TO GOOD USE, AND IT WAS IN THEIR INTEREST TO DO SO. MOREOVER, WE ARE ALREADY BEGINNING TO HEAR AGAIN RATHER WILD AND UNCONFIRMED

RUMORS THAT CUBAN TROOPS MAY APPEAR. BEYOND THAT IT QUESTIONABLE HOW THEY MIGHT HELP. IF SOVIETS HAVE TRIED TO RESTRAIN SOMALIS, EFFECTS NOT APPARENT AS YET.

6. MEANWHILE THERE ARE NO PARTICULAR SIGNS OF TROUBLE IN ADDIS ITSELF. POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS OF LOW-LEVEL CADRE CONTINUE REGULARLY, AND LEVEL OF NIGHTTIME FIRING HAS INCREASED A NOTCH, BUT CITY ITSELF GIVES EVERY APPEARANCE OF SURFACE CALM. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF HEIGHTENED SECURITY MEASURES, NOR RUMORS OF DISSENSION IN DIRG. RUMORS OF NEW ARRESTS AND/OR EXECUTIONS HAVE BECOME ALMOST NON-EXISTENT. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS THAT IF MENGISTU AND MILITARY CAN HOLD ON, PARTICULARLY IN SUCH PLACES AS ASSAB, FOR NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS OR UNTIL NEW
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WEAPONRY IS SUFFICIENTLY AVAILABLE AND TROOPS ARE CAPABLE OF USING IT, AND IF MILITIA CAN MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION, EPMG MAY BEGIN TO SEE DAYLIGHT.

7. IN SUM, SITUATION IS REACHING, IF IT HAS NOT ALREADY DONE SO, VERY DIFFICULT STAGE FOR EPMG, AND RESULTS ON BATTLE FRONTS MAY WELL HAVE DECISIVE IMPACT ON FUTURE OF MENGISTU AND DIRG. YET WE ARE NOT READY TO WRITE EITHER ONE OFF EVEN SHOULD ERITREA OR OGADEN BE LOST. ROLE OF ARMY STILL LIKELY TO BE PARAMOUNT, BUT MENGISTU HAS ALSO SKILLFULLY PLAYED ON ETHIOPIAN PATRIOTISM, AND WHILE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO JUDGE, MAY HAVE BROADER SUPPORT AMONG PEASANTS AND WORKERS IN PARTICULAR, SHOULD SSHOW-DOWN COME, THAN HE IS OFTEN GIVEN CREDIT FOR. HE IS ALSO NOT ONE TO GIVE UP EASILY AND CAN BE EXPECTED MARSHAL AS MUCH OUTSIDE SUPPORT, BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL, AS HE CAN FROM EASTER EUROPEANS AND AFRICANS.
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